



## HS district cuts adult education

**Natalie Ragus/Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, June 18, 2009 12:00 am**

The Santa Maria Joint Union High School District passed a two-year budget Wednesday that contained \$8.5 million in cuts, and eliminated the district's adult education program beginning in 2010-11.

The district also eliminated or reduced 25 nonteaching positions.

A standing room-only crowd spilled out into an adjacent warehouse as the board of trustees unanimously approved the budget and the layoffs.

Several people spoke out in favor of adult education, including Victor Zamudio, a graduate from the program.

Formerly involved with gangs, Zamudio turned himself around when he earned his diploma through adult education.

"I learned a lot from this program," he said. "This program helped me discover the good that was inside me ... this program saved my life. It took me off the train I was on and put me on the road to success."

Bus driver Tom Fast made his case against transportation personnel cuts.

Five bus driver positions got the ax. The district also reduced 17 bus driver positions to four hours per day and downsized three transportation attendant slots to three hours per day.

"A bus driver is the first school official

students see and we're the last school official students see," Fast said. "We show up with a smile on our face."

The personnel cuts came with corresponding transportation service reductions; Students will only be allowed to take the bus if they live more than 3.5 miles from school.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed \$1.3 billion in midyear cuts to education and \$4 billion for next year in response to the failure of a slew of ballot measures that would have generated enough revenue to close the fiscally ailing state's \$24.3 billion deficit.

The 2009-10 state budget Schwarzenegger signed in February already included an approximately 7.25-percent reduction in school funding, combined with \$4.6 billion in deferred payments to schools.

However, that budget also depended upon five ballot measures in the May 19 special election designed to rake in several billion dollars for the state's general fund.

Since those measures didn't pass, the state has gone into the red and the Legislature has to create a new budget, which means schools have no choice but to return to the chopping block.

To offset the cuts, the state gave school districts the flexibility to transfer money earmarked for approximately 40 state-funded "categorical" programs into the districts' general operating budgets.

That means schools can decide how and where they want to use the money.

However, the sweeping came at the expense of a number of categorical programs, including adult education.

"If the program were to go away, we would see many more people on welfare," said adult education teacher Emma Rodriguez. "This is an extremely important program for our community ... it's not an expensive program, it serves the community and this is not the time to take this program away."

Elizabeth McGill credits the program with her success thus far.

"Without this program, my achievements would not have been possible," she said.

Presiding over his final board meeting before his impending retirement, Superintendent Jeff Hearn expressed anger over having to eliminate adult education, but said the district's core mission is teaching high school students.

"If I look at our focus," he said, "adult education doesn't fit in."

Other programs or services that suffered diminished funding through sweeping are the Arts and Music Block Grant and the School and Library Block Grant.

Though the district considered eliminating summer school altogether, it instead ceased offering summer courses to all but incoming and outgoing seniors over concerns that graduation rates could dwindle.

The budget also eliminated funding for a program that limits core-subject class sizes for freshmen to 20 students. Library assistant positions were reduced by three full-time equivalent positions, as were three school support secretaries and one delivery driver position.

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